

Please pass SB367 (HB716)

Hello! I am Barbara Sollner-Webb, lifetime Maryland resident. For nearly two-decades is was an active member of the Patuxent River Commission (PRC) -- until being removed last fall, along with the Patuxent Riverkeeper and a few others who also worked hard for the good of the river (and hence were at odds with the Secretary of the Department of Planning).

The PRC is Maryland's only governmental river commission, created in the 1980's as a safety valve for concerns about the decline of the Patuxent River (following years of lawsuits, activism and governmental studies seeking solutions to the steady decline of the State's longest and deepest intrastate river). For very many years, the PRC was impressively effective in helping preserve and enhance the Patuxent River.

Notably, a number of the most positive things that the PRC has been acclaimed for over the years -- including creating a much-used "Patuxent Water Trail" website, initiating a recurring Patuxent Environmental Summit, and running numerous stream clean-ups and tree-planting sessions -- were all done by the Patuxent Riverkeeper, Fred Tutman, who was the longest-serving member of the PRC, until his recent dismissal. As probably everyone here knows, the Patuxent Riverkeeper (Fred Tutman) has an admirable history of working to preserve and enhance the Patuxent River, So it is "curious" that the Secretary of the Department of Planning explained Fred's dismissal by saying he wants "*new perspectives*" for the Commission, suggesting that the Secretary's intended "*new perspectives*" may be different than preserving and enhancing the Patuxent River.

As PRC members, Fred and I had resisted when the Secretary of the Department of Planning tried to insist the PRC could no longer address proposed development projects that the Commission feared could be damaging to the river. Since the PRC's enabling statute includes that role for the Commissioners, Senator Rosapepe and Delegate Healey kindly asked the Maryland's Attorney General, who reinforced that position, angering the Secretary of the Department of Planning. Yet he recently acknowledged in media accounts that he still believes the PRC is his to control. Indeed, he and/or the Governor recently violated the legitimate PRC Commissioner appointment procedure by (i) by not obtaining the "*advice and consent of the [Maryland State] Senate*" before any new Commissioner tis appointed, as is mandated in the PRC's enabling statute, (ii) before that, by not asking advice from the serving Commissioners for new individuals to fill any vacancies, and (iii) by recently making a new appointment who does not fulfill the residency requirements of the enabling statute.

For at least the last 20 years, by far the strongest voices on the PRC speaking for the health of the river have been the five citizen/environmentalist positions, whose selection the PRC's enabling statues mandates must be brought before the Senate, which is not-w being ignored. Thus, we feel it is very important to return at least the Patuxent Riverkeeper's voice and expertise to the PRC, by passing SB367 (HB716.)

Furthermore, please consider amending the legislation by adding to the PRC's roster not only the Patuxent Riverkeeper but also a member of the Patuxent Riverkeeper's Board of Directors, to be chosen by the Patuxent Riverkeeper.

In summary, to hopefully reinstate the PRC to being the best forum in the State for raising and exploring solutions to the problems of a formerly healthy river that now consistently gets a D- in water quality, please pass SB367/HB716. It would be a tribute to the wonderful and recently departed Senator Bernie Fowler who was the inspiring force for the PRC.

Thank you for considering this testimony.

sincerely,
Barbara

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